The Washington Merry-go-round

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WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is investigating some strange high-jinks, ranging from prostitution to fraud, inside the Immigration Service. From official files, here are the allegations:

—A White House budget official, Eugene Tryck, allegedly was taken to Mexican bordellos by immigration big-wigs who hoped to blackmail him into boosting their budget.

—Deputy Associate Immigration Commissioner Lowell Martindale, it is also charged, "apparently smuggled a female Mexican alien from Nogales into the United States in the trunk of his car.'

—Martindale and Immigration's budget officer, Alton Kirbey, "shared the same Mexican prostitute," alleges a Justice Department document, "while ostensibly on a trip involving official matters."

—Another Immigration official, Alfonso Velarde, sometimes "brought prostitutes across the border into the United States in order to 'entertain' high-ranking government officials," the document charges. Other top government bigwigs "on official business" made "forays to the houses of prostitution in Mexico" where they were also "entertained." Among those accused of combining sex with business are former Assistant Attorney Leo Pellerzi, Immigration officials Ellis Myers and Alton Kirbey.

To bankroll all this high living, Martindale allegedly "misused and misapplied" money from the Immigration Service's "confidential fund," which was "under his direct control." Specifically, the taxpayers' money was used to finance "parties and payments to prostitutes," according to the charges on file.

All these titillating tales have been hotly denied by the accused officials. The allegations were made by Immigration agent Norman Summers, who has given the Justice Department a detailed statement. We have obtained an official summary of his charges from the confidential files.

The romancing of the White House budget official, according to this summary, took place in September 1970. Summers has sworn that he and Martindale took Tryck to Chihauhau, Mexico, "ostensibly for official business." But "Tryck apparently visited Mexican houses of prostitution," although there is no statement that he actually engaged a prostitute.

But Summers' statement makes clear that the two immigration officials had something in mind besides a Mexican hayride. The trip "had for its real purpose," Summers alleges, "efforts ... to compromise Tryck so that he, Tryck, would look favorably on future budget requests" from the Immigration Service.

As for the smuggling of the Nogales woman into the United States in Martindale's car trunk, Summers claims that a General Services Administration official "was then a passenger in the vehicle."

Some officials discount Summers' charges, because they were made under duress. He didn't go to the Justice Department until he came under investigation himself. According to Summers' account, Martindale came to him and pleaded: "You're not going to squeal on us, are you?"

The Justice Department dropped an indictment against Summers so he could be a government witness. Other immigration agents have come forward with similar allegations against their bosses.

The whole sordid affair began with "Operation Cleansweep," which was supposed to clean up corruption in the Immigration Service. Now there are charges that the only sweeping is under the rug. Some immigration agents, disgruntled over the Justice Department's failure to act against the higher-ups, have characterized "Cleansweep" privately as a dirty broom job.

Footnote: A Justice spokesman told us "we have explored all of the allegations made by Summers and have been unable to find support for much of what he said. The investigation is continuing." Many of the accused officials failed to return our calls, but we have learned independently that they have vigorously denied the charges. Pellerzi, for example, testified that an Immigration official tried to set him up with a prostitute in June 1969. But Pellerzi swore that he had declined. Martindale also gave a point-by-point denial under oath before a secret grand jury.

STATE DEPARTMENT WHISPERS: French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing agreed at his Martinique meeting with President Ford to reconsider France's nuclear noncooperation. Ford proposed standardizing nuclear safeguards, and d'Estaing agreed to take it up with the United States in mid-1975 ... The United States got the approval of Japan, West Germany and other oil-consuming nations before President Ford went to Martinique to seek France's agreement. The consumer nations will seek out common ground on oil conservation, alternative sources, financial arrangements and emergency sharing ... President Ford came back from Martinique triumphant. "After a decade of coolness," he told White House visitors, "relations are improved." He described the French president as "able, well informed and quite cooperative in our talks" ... Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, after secret talks with the Greek and Turkish foreign ministers, has described the situation privately as "delicate." But he has confided: "We have great hopes of political talks in the very near future."